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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: DAS Kramer Discusses Elections with Kozulin's
Campaign Team

Ref: A) Minsk 192 B) Minsk 191 C) Minsk 223 D) Minsk 200

Classified by Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4 (B,D)

1. (C) Summary: EUR DAS David Kramer met with opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin and his campaign team during his recent trip to Belarus. Kozulin claimed the authorities are afraid and are working to increase the level of fear among the population. Kramer underscored the need for all parties to refrain from using violence, but Kozulin said he would do whatever is "expedient" and "unpredictable" to marshal public support for his candidacy. Kozulin boasted of the energizing effect his first televised speech had on the country. Kozulin criticized Lukashenko on several fronts and complained about the Central Election Committee's decision not to force Lukashenko to take a leave of absence during the campaign. Kozulin described his close ties to Moscow and his hope to be a candidate who is acceptable to both Moscow and the West. Kramer reiterated U.S. interest in Belarus, stressed the united position of the U.S. and EU on the elections and pledged U.S. engagement with Belarusian society regardless of the outcome of the election. End Summary.

2. (C) On February 24, EUR DAS David Kramer, accompanied by Ambassador and Embassy note takers, met with Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada" presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin, his campaign manager Myacheslav Grib, and Alexei Korol, who is responsible for developing Kozulin's campaign platform.

Kozulin Notes Level of GOB Preparedness For Opposition

Protests

3. (C) Kozulin claimed that the authorities have taken extraordinary measures to prevent street demonstrations and are trying to increase the level of fear in the population. According to Kozulin, the special services and police have divided the city into sections, have started patrolling and planning response scenarios, and will be on high alert as of March 10. Kozulin claimed that if the police feel threatened, they would not stop short of using violence.

Kramer Emphasizes the Importance of Non-Violent Elections

¶4. (C) Saying he was passing this message to all parties, Kramer strongly underscored the importance of the elections being concluded without any resort to force or violence. Kramer said he told the GOB that Belarus should abide by its OSCE obligations and allow its people to peacefully protest if they so desire. Kramer holds the activists to the same standards Q they can protest and make their opinions known, but they must do it in a peaceful manner.

¶5. (C) Kozulin agreed with Kramer but stated that the GOB has already started to use violence, citing the recent spike in arrests and detentions of opposition activists and Kozulin's struggle with the authorities at the National Press Center on February 17 (refs A and B). Kozulin claimed that the authorities are afraid which is why they have already started arresting and using violence.

Kozulin's Election Strategies

¶6. (C) When Kramer asked if Kozulin planned to remain in the race until the end, Kozulin responded that he will remain a candidate for as long as the Belarusian authorities allow him. Kozulin noted the situation in Belarus is dynamic and he will do whatever is "expedient" when it is "expedient" to do it. Kozulin promised to act in an "unpredictable way" and noted he planned on gaining access to the March 2-3 All-Belarus Assembly. [Note: On March 2, Kozulin attempted to attend this Assembly and was detained and beaten by police before being released later in the day (ref C). He now faces criminal charges for "hooliganism."]

¶7. (C) Kozulin identified possible scenarios for the opposition if it became evident prior to Election Day that Lukashenko would engage in gross fraud to secure an election victory. Kozulin first proposed to Milinkevich that Milinkevich and he withdraw from the race simultaneously. Another alternative that Kozulin mentioned was holding another round of elections on July 16, the originally scheduled date for the presidential elections. Kozulin also suggested that Lukashenko may appoint him prime minister if Kozulin receives a significant number of votes.

¶8. (C) Kozulin said that he does not support joining forces with Milinkevich. He opined that they will receive more votes separately than if they combined forces because Kozulin claimed that not all of his followers would vote for Milinkevich. Kramer stressed that the U.S. supports a democratic process of free and fair elections and not any one candidate.

Kozulin's Television Debut

¶9. (C) When Kramer asked about Kozulin's first televised remarks, the candidate boasted that his "charged and dynamic" speech overturned the whole country. [Note: On February 22, Belarusian state television aired Kozulin's first 30-minute pre-recorded presidential candidate speech, which in part slandered Lukashenko (ref D).] Kozulin likened the country to an "open beehive" buzzing with excitement over his remarks. Kozulin claimed that his campaign headquarters was flooded with a storm of phone calls following the television spot.

¶10. (C) When Kramer asked how the GOB responded to Kozulin's remarks, Kozulin said the GOB was deeply disconcerted about his speech. He claimed the regime held a meeting after the speech to assess its impact. Kozulin also claimed that the Central Election Committee (CEC) did not know what to do about his first television message. Before the broadcast, Kozulin said that the CEC was not sure whether they should allow the piece to run as is, edit

it, or not show it at all. In the end, Kozulin said that they showed it in its entirety. [Note: Kozulin's second 30-minute pre-recorded message on March 2 was edited.] According to Kozulin, the GOB also debated the question of initiating criminal charges against him and the CEC disqualifying him on those grounds. [Note: On March 4, CEC secretary Nikolai Lozovik told Pol/Econ Chief that Kozulin

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will likely remain a candidate given that the criminal charges against him are not sufficient grounds for disqualification. See septel.]

Kozulin Bashes Lukashenko, Election Process

¶11. (C) Kozulin claimed that Lukashenko has violated election rules by not taking a leave of absence during his re-election campaign as required by Article 77 of the Election Code. [Note: Article 77 rule states that any candidate campaigning for President must take a leave of absence from work after being registered.] The law specifies, however, that presidential incumbents seeking a second term are exempt from the rule. Kozulin pointed out that Lukashenko is seeking a third term, not a second, and therefore he should be required to take a leave of absence. [Note: CEC President Lidya Yermoshina's rejected Kozulin's demand, noting that while the law specifically mentions a second term and not a third, the "spirit of the law" implies that Lukashenko does not have to take a leave of absence. This position contradicts Yermoshina's and the CEC's prior rulings where they have closely followed the letter of the law, and not the spirit.]

¶12. (C) Kozulin challenged Lukashenko's supposed strong popular support base, stating that the "icon (i.e. Lukashenko) has fallen." The candidate asserted that 60-80 percent of GOB officials in reality support him, and not Lukashenko. Kozulin described how easy it was for him to collect signatures during the nomination campaign, even at

Mogilev University (i.e. Lukashenko's alma mater). Kozulin claimed Lukashenko has fewer people to trust, citing the President's decision to appoint former Presidential Administration Head Victor Sheiman as his campaign manager. Referring to Sheiman's likely participation in the 1999-2000 disappearances of prominent opposition activists when he was Minister of Interior, Kozulin said both Lukashenko and Sheiman have nothing to lose since Sheiman's hands are "already covered in blood." Kozulin asserted that the only options left for Lukashenko are to shuffle people around the government or to hire corrupt people. Kozulin added that Lukashenko is preparing his two sons to be his successors.

Kozulin Claims Close Relations with Moscow, Not With Europe

¶13. (C) Kozulin stressed he maintained good relations with Moscow. Kozulin told Kramer that he hopes to position himself as a candidate favorable to Russia and the West. He reminded Kramer that Belarus cannot ignore its political and economic interests in Moscow. Kozulin noted his plans to have high-level meetings with members of the Russian Duma, although he acknowledged concrete dates have not been scheduled. Kozulin also claimed that a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin would not be out of the question except that the current political situation in Russia does not allow it.

¶14. (C) When Kramer asked why Kozulin has not traveled more to Europe, Kozulin responded that he is not able to set up meetings because "the other candidate" (i.e. Milinkevich) has effectively branded Kozulin as a GOB decoy. Kozulin mentioned that he would like to meet with German Chancellor Merkel in Berlin to enlist her help in using Germany as a moderator between Russia and the West's conflict over Belarus. [Note: Kozulin is now in Germany but is unlikely

to meet Merkel according to the Germany Embassy.]

Relations with U.S.

¶15. (C) Kozulin noted that although he is personally favorably inclined toward the U.S., it is not particularly wise in Belarus to be seen as supportive of the U.S. The Belarusian electorate is still suspicious of the U.S. Nevertheless, he said he would welcome a meeting with President Bush or Secretary Rice before the elections to show he has the respect of the U.S. Kozulin noted that unfortunately the West has little leverage over Belarus except trade and that the West is not making effective use of this tool. Kozulin stressed that trade sanctions could bring about necessary political reform in the country.

¶16. (C) Noting that the U.S. and E.U. are reviewing all their policy options, Kramer reiterated that the U.S. and EU remain committed to promoting democratic change in Belarus. Kramer stated that regardless of the outcome of the upcoming elections, the U.S. and EU will continue to support Belarusian civil society.

¶17. (U) DAS Kramer did not review this cable.

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